

NRCS, neighbors differ on wetland dike issue

BY AMY ERICKSON
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A handful of property owners would like to see a dike built in a wetland area in western Plymouth County to help with flood control.

Neighbors to the E. C. Lippke Wetland, which is south of 240th Street and west of Highway 12, suggested building a diagonal dike from northeast to southwest on the western end of the county-owned wetland.

That idea was met unfavorably by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which has a conservation easement on the wetland.

The NRCS purchased the perma-

nent Emergency Wetland Reserve Program (EWRP) easement in 1998 at a cost of \$276,000, said Jim Lahn, district conservationist at the Le Mars NRCS office.

The EWRP easement specifies what types of activities are allowed or prohibited on the site so as not to disrupt the development of wetland for wildlife benefit, Lahn said.

Because the easement is between the NRCS and Plymouth County, he addressed the county board of supervisors Tuesday concerning the question of dikes in the wetland.

Based on discussions he's had with other NRCS officials, Lahn said the

neighbors' request to build a diagonal dike on the property is not an option the NRCS will consider.

The main reason is the NRCS feels a dike built in that area would disturb plant and animal life because it would divert water flow by dissecting the site, Lahn said.

Neighboring property owners at the meeting like Barry Knapp felt creation of a levy in that area would actually enhance the wetland.

Kirk Banks, another property owner, maintained a dike built in that area would not be large enough to disrupt the wetland.

"It would be nothing more than a

speed bump out there," Banks said. "You're not talking about a huge pile of dirt here."

A second option discussed was to build an east/west dike on the north side of 240th Street, out of the wetland area on private property.

Supervisor Craig Anderson noted if this dike were built, property owners would not have to inform the county should they want to do maintenance on it.

"They would have total control of it," Anderson said.

Banks said an engineer told him he didn't believe the Department

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of Natural Resources (DNR) would permit the building of a dike on the north side of 240th Street.

Anderson noted that was only the opinion of one engineer and not a DNR decision.

Whatever the supervisors decide concerning the wetland covered in the easement, they would have to develop a Compatible Use Authorizations agreement with the NRCS, Lahn said.

Because the easement is between the county and the NRCS, his organization works with the county — not directly with neighboring property owners, Lahn said.

He also advised the super-

visors if activities prohibited in the easement occur in the wetland, the county as owners could be fined or otherwise penalized.

In addition to levies, Lahn, the neighbors and the supervisors also discussed an existing maintenance agreement pertaining to a drainage ditch in the wetland.

Banks would like to have a permanent agreement giving property owners the right to go in the wetland for ditch maintenance when needed instead of waiting for county and NRCS approval.

The supervisors made no concrete decisions on either issue. However, on their behalf Lahn will check with the DNR to see if a dike could be built on private property

on 240th Street, Anderson said.

Supervisor Jack E. Guenther would also like a representative from DNR and the NRCS' easement program team coordinator from Des Moines to come before the supervisors.

Nothing was determined as to whether that course of action would be taken, but the supervisors are leaving the lines of communication open between them, the wetland neighbors and NRCS.

"We want to be good neighbors," Anderson said. "If they want to protect their land, we want to help them do it. But we can't be spending lots of tax dollars to help them do it."